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AUTHOR Borodkin, Thelma L.
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ABSTRACT

After 1580 the English language was no longer considered barbarous because important works had been written in it, its vocabulary had expanded, and it had been adorned with the devices of classical rhetoric. It did not have, however, a dictionary or grammar, the fourth quality that makes a language eloquent. Thus, the eighteenth century grammarians set out to "ascertain and fix" the English language, to determine the correct forms of English and prevent the language from decay by change. Their task was undermined by their failure to recognize that changes in language are often the results of forces too complex to be fully analyzed or predicted, their failure to recognize the legitimacy of divided usage or usage as the sole arbiter in linguistic matters, and their ignorance of the processes of language change. The most insidious effect of the principle of only one correct form is that students have been indoctrinated with the conviction that they are worthless because of their language. Students have a right to know that variation is characteristic of all languages, that every linguistic code is valid if it communicates a message, that some usage is wrong only because it hampers effective communication, and that the purpose of having a language standard is to facilitate communication, not to evaluate humans. (HTH)

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Standardization and the English Teacher in the Eighties

Thelma L. Borodkin, Ph.D.

In the 18th c. there was a concerted effort to "ascertain and fix" the English language. That is, the aim of the 18th c. grammarians was to determine "the" correct forms of English and to prevent the language from further ceday by change. They tolerated no variation and were quite dogmatic in the rules they set down. Those rules have continued to exert an influence on us as speakers and teachers of English. There is much evidence (Rist, Shuy, DeStefano, F. Williams and Stubbs) that teachers' attitudes, which are based on 18th c. doctrine, often lead to unfavorable evaluations of students whose dialects differ from that of their teachers.

We are often surprised to learn that present facts do not always accurately reflect the past. Such an example is the fact that English is the language of what we now call England. This was not always so. However, by the 17th century, English had become the established language of England, having battled and won over its two chief competitors, Latin and French. Among the speakers of English there was a growing feeling that there ought to be one correct form, thus setting the stage for the 18th c. grammarians who gladly accepted the responsibility.

The subject of this paper, then, is standardization. I will show how the stage was set for the 18th c. grammarians as English moved from barbarous to eloquent to correct. Then I will describe the 18th c. grammarians and explain their aims, concerns, and philosophies. I will end that part of the paper with an evaluation of the work of the 18th c. grammarians. In the second part of the paper, I will discuss what standardization means, show were standard English originated, present a rationale for standardization, and

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end with some implications for us as teachers of English.

From barbarous to eloquent to correct -

When compared with Latin, English had earlier been labeled barbarous, i.e. "inexpressive, lacking in eloquence." By the end of the 16th c., however, English was being favorably compared with other languages. And, there were even those who went to the other extreme and stated that English was superior to other languages. This change in attitude, and one which was to be of great significance in the consideration of the attempt at standardization, took place quite suddenly between 1575 and 1580 (Jones).

After 1580, English was no longer barbarous, but was considered eloquent, because it had the following features: First, English became eloquent because important works had been written in it. According to Jones, the works of Sidney and Spenser played an important part in convincing people that English was now an eloquent language. Secondly, English became eloquent because its vocabulary had expanded, particularly through borrowing from Latin and Greek. For example, the copiousness of the English vocabulary is often singled out for praise. Thirdly, English had been made eloquent by having been adorned with the devices of classical rhetoric from the time of Spenser onwards.

The fourth quality that establishes a language as eloquent is the fact that the language is "fixed" or "ruled." English, unlike Latin and Greek, did not yet have a dictionary or a grammar, and there was, therefore, uncertainty about spelling, about acceptable vocabulary, and about grammatical usage. Thus, fixing and regulating became the concern of the 18th century, and it was this

concern that occupied the 18th century grammarians.

The 18th century grammarians

The 18th century grammarians were more or less conversant with classical texts; they had, however, little or no conception of the history and relation of the classical or other languages. They were mainly clergymen, retired gentlemen, and amateur philosophers. They chose not to bother with the statement that usage is the "sole arbiter and norm of speech." Although they did know that English was a language of teutonic origin and that the changing of a language is a highly complex undertaking, they ignored the information and proceeded with their work (Leonard 1929, p. 12).

Their lack of linguistic training did not deter them from their stated mission. On the contrary, Robert Baker, publisher of Reflections on the English Language, a book widely used in the English schools, boasted that he knew no Latin or Greek, had not looked at Johnson's dictionary for lack of one, and owned no more books than a religious old woman absorbed in her devotional activities, this latter for lack of funds (Baugh 1968, p. 332).

The 18th century grammarians had three main aims: 1. to codify the principles of the language and reduce it to rule. 2. to settle disputed points and decide causes of divided usage. 3. to point out common errors or what were supposed to be errors, and thus correct and improve the language. They pursued all three aims concurrently (Baugh 1968, p. 332).

They used the term to "ascertain" in a unique sense; to them it meant to "fix the language, to render it certain and free from doubts and divisions of opinion as to what was correct usage." This, then, was the definition of standardization in the view of

the 18th century grammarians. Reflecting the widespread concern that the educated speakers of English had about the lack of an English dictionary as well as the lack of an English grammar, they set about writing those materials. They used as models the classical languages, Latin and Greek, particularly Latin, which was considered the most perfect of all languages. They pointed out that both those languages had gained their stature due to their lack of change and the existence of both a grammar and a dictionary. Latin had been stabilized in grammar and rhetoric and had been taught in schools; it had written grammars and dictionaries which could be appealed to. The 18th century grammarians forgot that Latin had come to them in a fixed form and that neither Latin nor Greek was in current use, thus allowing forms to remain fixed. In addition, the English schoolmasters, who had inherited medieval Latin, inherited the attitudes of the medieval schoolmasters as well. They too were convinced that there was only one right way of using Latin and many slovenly, wrong ways.

This notion of correctness was at first not believed to apply to the "degenerate" vernaculars until authoritative grammars and dictionaries were written to regulate the language and lay down the laws. It was then thought that there were no laws that could be violated.

Leonard (1929) states that in the 18th century there were two contrasting theories of usage. One assumed the power of reason to remold language completely and appealed to various principles of metaphysics or logic or even made pronouncements on mere individual preference posing as authority in the endeavor to "correct, improve, and fix" usage. The second theory, while admitting the

usefulness of purism in recommending what might be regarded as improvements, recognized language - even cultivated language - as a vastly complicated and often haphazard growth of habits stubbornly rooted, the product of great variation in social soil and climate, not readily altered by fiat. The adherents of the second theory were primarily interested in studying the facts of usage, determining as much as possible of their history and causes and attempting to classify them according to valid criteria of their social effects in communication (Leonard 1929, p. 13). Perhaps Priestley best exemplified this attitude. Most of the other 18th century grammarians adopted the first, non-scientific theory of usage.

In the beginning, the 18th century grammarians were less concerned with grammar than with other sorts of logic and patterns of vocabulary. But when Bishop Lowth, particularly, listed the grammatical errors of admired writers, the hunt was on. Writers searched for errors in each other's works and wrote about and condemned each other's practice (Leonard 1929, p. 235). Variation was not tolerated in most of the work of the 18th century grammarians with the exception of a handful, mainly Priestley. The goal of those writers was to enlarge and round out neatly the area of disapproved speech by logical analysis. They refused to recognize exceptions and anomalies, and they divided the unacceptable in a sharp line from the acceptable. They did not consider the fact that all language users adjust their style or register to fit the audience, purpose, and occasion of the speech act. They wanted everything smooth and logical and could not tolerate differences.

Some of the points on which the 18th century grammarians concentrated are still issues in prescriptive grammar today. That is,

they form a substantial part of the English language program in most schools and appear, consequently, on many tests of English proficiency. For example, there was the matter of subject/verb concord. You was was strongly condemned for its lack of analogy with you are. They were concerned with the number of a verb after a number of, none, or no one, and suggested a variety of recommendations. They used their in reference to everybody and were prone to say these kind. Another point which concerned 18th century grammarians was the vague reference of pronouns, usually this or which. Most of the grammarians felt that an explicit antecedent for these words was logically necessary.

Other examples of their concern were: the distinction between lie and lay, whose in place of which, different from as opposed to different than or to, between you and I, between and among, it is me rather than it is I, the larger not largest of the of the two, and the case of the noun after than and as. They condemned this here and that there and worried about I don't like him doing that or I don't like his doing that. This continued into the 19th century. In 1829 I have got to go was unacceptable. Today we might say it or write it informally, not formally. Proved was acceptable, while proven was not, although twenty years earlier they ruled the opposite in England. In 1879 during the evening was correct, while in the evening was not.

Standardization and the prestige dialect

Standardization could be termed a leveling of variation. Greenberg (1977), for example, defines standardization as the development of a new, uniform form of language which transcends the

differences between the existing dialects. Linguistically, it is usually based on one particular dialect which already has attained some superiority on nonlinguistic grounds. Sometimes, however, a conscious attempt is made to develop a new form which incorporates widespread features of a number of different dialects. This may be based on a "scientific" attempt in which linguistics is used, as was the case in Norway. It may, on the other hand, be the result of more idiosyncratic individual activity.

Thus, when an attempt is made to standardize a language, the question that immediately arises is which is the correct form. To this the linguistically sophisticated reply that usage is the criterion of correctness. In addition to questioning whose usage, the determination is still a difficult one to make. For example, the notion that is prevalent in society that usage is based on logic, interferes with attempts to identify "what is correct" as simply "what is used."

Therefore, the issue of the prestige dialect inevitably arises when an attempt is made to standardize a language. The prestige dialect derives its status from the users of the dialect. There is nothing that is intrinsically part of the linguistic nature of a language that makes one language or dialect superior to another. For example, Bloomfield (1964) says that the nearest approach to an explanation of "good" and "bad" language seems to be this: by accumulation of obvious superiorities, both of character and standing, as well as of language, some persons are felt to be better models of conduct and speech than others. Therefore, even in matters where the preference is not obvious, the forms which these same persons use are felt to have the better flavor. In addition,

Bloomfield and Newmark (1963) state that those varieties or dialects of each language have developed prestige exactly to the extent that the users of those varieties or dialects have been looked up to by other users of these languages. Moreover, although it is well known that wherever languages were spoken there was always variation, it is unfortunately generally believed that linguistic change belongs to the past - Shakespeare, Middle English or Old English; those Englishes are considered appropriate for scholarly research. Examples of linguistic change today, however, usually elicit a different reaction; it is vulgar or careless or ungrammatical or uneducated. People have often become moralists telling speakers how they ought to talk rather than contemplating, with detachment, the process going on in the language today (Barber 1976).

Thus, this attitude of deploring change in language has a long history in English and was one of the motivating forces that drove the 18th century grammarians to expend great effort to halt such change. This, despite the fact that earlier grammarians had recognized usage as the chief arbiter of correctness.

However, in modern societies, with their large urban populations, it is often the various dialects that serve as status markers rather than individual languages. This is particularly true in monolingual America. Bloomfield and Newmark (1963) state that probably all linguistic communities have some feeling for status and social distinctions as revealed in language, when that language is accepted as the normal means of coomunication by all groups in a society. The kind of language used, like the kind of material possessions one has, then, is a status symbol in society.

Accordingly, the value of a dialect reflects that put upon it

by the members of society who classify and evaluate language as they do other forms of human behavior, i.e. dress or manners. Members of society seem to formulate an unwritten, unspoken contract between themselves and their group. They agree to follow norms in dress, behavior and language. The choice of the variety which serves as a model is based on what the individual deems desirable, either through deliberate choice or ignorance of alternatives. In the 18th century the dialect that was considered prestigious was that used in the area around London, the cultural and industrial center of 18th century England. Observers found it necessary to mention and condemn not only country dialects, but also the speech of the vulgar, of the effeminate and affected people, and of the courtiers (Dobson 1957).

In addition, religious and political factors may influence linguistic preference. For example, after the Reformation the Puritans wanted to disassociate themselves from the Roman Catholic Church. Latin, as the language of the church, was therefore disdained by the Puritans. And, political considerations may also operate on language such as the situation in Norway where the choice of a national language has taken on political colorings. Furthermore, there are social considerations which connect language to prestigious groups in society. For example, being able to speak French was once considered a desirable social grace in the higher social echelons in England and in most of Europe. Therefore, the variety of English that became the standard had little to do with the intrinsic linguistic superiority of the London dialect over others existing at that time.

Evaluation

Baugh (1968) writes that the early grammarians had four weaknesses: 1) They failed to recognize usage as the sole arbiter in linguistic matters. 2) They failed to recognize that changes in language are often the results of forces too complex to be fully analyzed or predicted. 3) They attepted to legislate ignoring the legitimacy of divided usage. 4) And, finally, at the root of all their mistakes was their ignorance of the processes of language change (344).

The 18th century grammarians had set out to regulate the language by emphasizing matters of correctness and precision. This they did. The publication of Johnson's dictionary in 1755 and the publication of the numerous grammars provided those inclined with authorities as to correct usage. They also united the dialects of Scotland, Ireland and Wales into one standard language. And there is no question but that the interest in language problems that they aroused and probably helped create, had useful effects in causing greater popular appreciation and respect for the skill of using English. Writers like Dr. Winship, Morris and Wyld point out that standards for spelling and grammar had already been established and were already available. And there is no account of changes in inflection after 1700 (Leonard, 233). Moreover, by 1825, English had a prestigious "correct" form which was standardized more or less in dictionaries and grammars (Bloomfield and Newmark 1963, pp. 297-298).

Nevertheless, the efforts of the 18th century grammarians seemed to focus on issues that have proven very resistant to modification, while other issues, such as effective communication, were largely ignored by the 18th century grammarians with the ex-

ception of people like Locke. Moreover, there were some like Priestley, Campbell, Dr. Johnson and Horne Tooke who did useful and even brilliant work. However, for the most part the thinking of the 18th century grammarians was off target. They built a neo-Platonic philosophy of a divinely instituted language, perfectly mirroring actuality, but debased by man, and they labored to restore its pristine perfection. They believed that English could and must be subjected to a process of classical regularizing. Where actual usage was observed, it was in general to denounce and reform the actual idiom (Leonard 1929, p. 14).

Although it would be agreed by all sensible humans that there are times when certain expressions would be objectionable, the fact that such expressions were objectionable at all made them forever unacceptable in the eyes of the 18th century grammarians. They were to "fix and regulate" the language and proceeded to do just that. They concerned themselves with speech, language and society, dialect, metaphor, and tone and tune. Although some of their opinions would seem to be very modern, others, unfortunately those that endured with the greatest vitality, were woefully inaccurate (Tucker 1961).

The present-day language learners, as all the inheritors of that mammoth effort to regulate the language, have been enormously affected. There is nobody who has not at some time worried over his/her choice of words, sentence structure or vocabulary. Such concern would be valid if it were based on the criterion of effective communication. The purpose of language is, after all, to enable the users to transmit messages effectively. But, when the sole criterion is correctness, with its accompanying doubts as to

personal self-worth reflecting linguistic evaluation, one seriously questions what those gentlemen really did accomplish. What has come down to us is a law, perhaps more holy and inviolable than that which Moses brought down from Sinai. The basic tenet of that law is that there is only one way and that is the correct way. This disdain for variety, this insitence on the inviolability of one correct form is both linguistically inaccurate and humanly untenable. It is linguistically inaccurate because the history of language shows that from its very origin, language exhibited variety at every stage. Whether that variation resulted from geographical (earlier) or social (later) conditions is unimportant. The plain fact is that there is and always was variation in the way people used a language. Furthermore, such a belief is morally or humanly untenable. There is no such thing as one way to dress or one way to behave or one way to eat. These ways of doing things are subject to a variety of considerations not the least of which are the social and cultural environments in which they flourish. Moreover, it is fairly well known that doing things only one way, "the correct way," makes for a very rigid kind of personality and precludes all the marvelous varieties of dress, manners, and language that we see around us. Somebody once said that if we only knew what language God spoke, then ... To this we can only reply with the story of the Tower of Babel when the peoples of the world tried to build a tower that would reach to where God presumably lived. They believed they could do it through linguistic uniformity. How shocked they must have been when they realized that this brought the wrath of God down on their heads! For it was God Himself, as

the ancient Greeks and Hebrews believed, who fostered linguistic diversity, who nurtured that uniqueness in each ethnic group, and who respected that uniqueness by speaking to each group, each in their own language, so that they would understand how to conduct themselves. Similarly, how shocked our students would be to learn that those standards of correctness are, after all, of human invention! How shocked they would be to learn that there was a diversity of opinion and that "a Lowth, an Ash and a Priestley differed from each other in opinion." How amused some might be to find that ax for ask was once considered acceptable. How cruel that we have imposed this doctrine of only one correct way on language users! How terrible that we have led them down a false road lined with rows and rows of don't's and incorrect's, most of which they unfortunately employ as a regular part of their linguistic repertoire!

Therefore, it is difficult to say that those 18th century gentlemen contributed to the wisdom of humankind. In fact, what they seem to have done, through the English teachers, is to bring misery to generation after generation of school children who have been told that their language is lacking in some way and which has been translated to mean that they, the children, are lacking in some way (Borodkin 1979). Criticism in the 18th century went too far. It resulted in the kind of self-conscious writing that is prevalent among the academically well-prepared students and the feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness among the less well-prepared for academic tasks. Moreover, every language user is burdened with the task of effective communication. For this there has been little preparation in the schools. Communication has indeed

been treated as an "invisible" environment (Postman 1976). The rules are often revealed after infringement. Students know that tney do not wear pajamas to school, dungarees to sun-bathe in, or a wet suit to ski in. To confine oneself to only one kind of clothing would be ridiculous and even dangerous. Similarly, to confine oneself to one kind of language is equally ridiculous and self-limiting.

It is therefore apparent that the results of the mammoth effort expended by the 18th century grammarians to "ascertain and fix" the language were not justified. The reasons for this are twofold and can perhaps be best summarized by stating that those early grammarians started off with some false premises: 1) their desire to regulate the language so that there would be one "correct" form. 2) their desire to prevent the language from decay by change. Neither one of these premises has been found to be based on fact. Language, as a form of human behavior, has always been subject to variation and, so long as it is in the mouths of the language users, it is always subject to change as fashions in clothes are subject to change. The difficulty of those early grammarians lay in their ignorance of these facts and in their unwillingness to countenance both variety and change, for there is some evidence that they were aware of dialects.

Again, the issues on which they chose to focus their energies were of little substance. Those who are so inclined, follow the dictates of the educated community in their linguistic choices. The others are unfortunately saddled with feelings of inferiority because of their having been subjected to their English teachers' insistence on "correct" usage. The efforts of the English teachers

have been concentrated on the changing of the students' language, an aim that has not met with much success. Students have been indoctrinated with the firm conviction that they are worthless because of the language they use. And this is probably the most insidious effect of the principle of only one correct form.

Standardization and the English language curriculum

I should like to propose a rationale for standardization. My reasons are based on the now classic Shannon-Weaver theory of communication (1964). According to Shannon-Weaver, that which interferes with communication causes interference and is termed "noise." There are a number of interferences that can cause noise. For example, inappropriate spellings, inappropriate vocabulary or syntactic structures or forms detract from the message being communicated. These inappropriate forms cause attention to be focused on them, because they are unexpected in particular environments. The most important part of the message is thereby lost, for the receiver's attention is focused on the form of the message rather than on its content. The standard, therefore, is the form which attracts least attention to itself, because it is appropriate to user, context and purpose in academic settings.

Students need to learn how to become effective communicators, and they need to know what interferes with their communication. The work of such authors as Leonard (1929), Falk (1973), and Fries (1940) might be used in classrooms to give students the information they need. It would seem that the current concern for the latest in mathematical and scientific information should extend to concern for the latest in linguistic information. Students have a right to know the facts!

1. Students have a right to know that variation is, and always has been, a characteristic of all languages.

2. Students have a right to know that every linguistic code is valid provided it can communicate a message.

3. They have a right to know that the use of inappropriate forms causes interference in communication, diverting attention from the message to the form.

4. Students have a right to know that the purpose of having a standard is to facilitate communication, not to evaluate humans.

5. Finally, students have a right to know about the negative evaluation of those who do not use the standard. For, as Leonard says,

> The fact that objection to a form is based on false logic, or in mere ancient and ignorant prejudice, has nothing to do with the case; so long as feeling against a usage in fact exists, young people need to know this as protection against the prejudice which its use may arouse against them, e.g. the word "ain't" (Leonard 246).

The students have a right to know. And, it is our responsibility, as their English teachers, to tell them.

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